

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
STATEMENT ON INTRODUCTION OF WOLF EDUCATION BILL
April 12, 2005

Let me start by thanking Chairman Wolf for taking the initiative on this important measure and for reaching out to the Science Committee as he worked on it. In the few months since his science jurisdiction was expanded, Chairman Wolf has already demonstrated his thoughtful and passionate support for the nation's scientific enterprise, and we have strengthened our enormously cooperative relationship. I also want to thank Speaker Gingrich, who is ever a fount of innovative suggestions, for providing the impetus for this measure.

The rationale for this bill is simple and unarguable: the key to our nation's prosperity and security is its scientific prowess, and the key to its scientific prowess is its people. And yet we are letting our human resources wither. Despite some improvements, our students continue to lag behind their international peers in science and math. The number of science and math students drops at every level of schooling. We are too dependent on foreign students in our graduate programs, and we face increasing international competition to attract those students and to keep them here after they graduate. The list of concerns goes on and on.

So we need every conceivable tool to get American students to pursue training and careers in science, math and engineering. This bill will give us one more tool – not only by providing a financial incentive, but also by demonstrating that these careers are highly valued by society.

This program will build on several related current efforts. The Education Department offers loan forgiveness programs for teachers. The National Science Foundation (NSF), through programs created by the Science Committee, offers scholarships to top math and science students who agree to teach. NSF also offers grants to colleges and universities that develop ways to graduate more majors in science and math. And NSF offers a scholarship for service to students pursuing careers in cybersecurity. NASA is starting a scholarship for service program as well.

But the bill we are introducing today has some unique aspects. It will provide an incentive to enter into a variety of careers in science, math or engineering, in the private as well as the public sector. It will enable the scholarships to be focused on careers for which there is the greatest national need at any particular time. And it should increase the focus of the Department of Education on science, math and engineering.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to see this bill become law. And I can promise you that on the Science Committee we will continue to look for every means we can to increase the number, and improve the education of our science, math and engineering students.

Tomorrow, the Committee will be hearing from the winner of this year's Presidential Teaching Awards for Math and Science. This year, the awards are being given to elementary school teachers. We want to hear what the folks who are actually in our nation's classrooms are experiencing. From elementary school through college and on to graduate school and careers, we must do more to create a cadre of well educated, strongly motivated scientists and engineers. The bill we are announcing today is one important step in doing that. Thank you.